

Origins of terrorism

Psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of mind

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The moral logic of Hizballah

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"And verily the party of God is sure to triumph." In 1982, a group of Lebanese Shi'ite Muslims first adopted this verse of the *Qur'an* as their slogan and declared themselves to be "the party of God." Supported by many followers in Lebanon's large centers of Shi'ite population, and backed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, "the party of God"—Hizballah—has since become a movement with which all other Lebanese factions must reckon. Its growing ideological and armed strength is evident in its original stronghold in the Biqa Valley and in the predominantly Shi'ite southern suburbs of Beirut. Its fighters do sporadic battle with the rival Lebanese Shi'ite movement, Amal; with the Israeli-backed and predominantly Christian South Lebanon Army; and with Syrian forces stationed in Lebanon. In such pursuits, Hizballah is akin to the various other armed Lebanese factions, all battling for some advantage in the seesaw struggle for an ungoverned land. Like them, Hizballah propagandizes through rallies and speeches, a newspaper, and a radio station. The movement maintains command centers, training bases, and an armed militia. And its leaders conduct diplomacy to secure weapons, money, and support from allied factions and states.¹

¹The secondary literature on Hizballah is limited but growing. For an account of Hizballah's genesis, see Shimon Shapira, "The Origins of Hizballah," *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, 46 (Spring 1988): 115–30. For a brief description of the movement in the context of Lebanon's other Islamic movements, see Marian Deeb, *Militant Islamic Movements in Lebanon: Origins, Social Bases, and Ideology*, Occasional Papers Series of the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University (Washington, D.C., November 1986), 12–19. For the Lebanese Shi'ite background, see Fouad Ajami, *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and Shia of Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). For the evolution of Iranian policy toward Lebanon, see R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 179–95. Cf. journalistic accounts of Hizballah in books by Robin Wright, *Sacred Rage* (New York:

Yet Hizballah differs from other Lebanese militias in a fundamental respect. Its leaders, nearly all of whom are Shi'ite clerics, have fashioned in their own minds and in those of their followers a revolutionary vision of a new Lebanon. Hizballah's declared aim is the creation, sooner or later, of an Islamic state in Lebanon. Its mission is not to improve the relative position of one of Lebanon's constituent communities vis-à-vis all others but to make of Lebanon an ideal Islamic polity and society. In Hizballah's vision, Islam alone will redeem Lebanon from the ravages of civil war and foreign intervention, which are the consequences of Lebanon's attempt to assimilate the ways of the West.

It is certain that there is disagreement within Hizballah over how Lebanon's Islamic revolution should be hastened and whether this is an opportune moment to articulate a full plan. There are also differences on this score between certain leading figures in Hizballah and the movement's Iranian guides, who themselves are divided over how best to transform Lebanon. But for Hizballah's rank and file, these debates are of no great importance. The young men and women of Hizballah are fired by the pure image of a future Lebanon that will regain stability through Islamic law and justice and embark on a redeeming struggle against those who would banish Islam from this Earth.

The framework of Hizballah

It is a pervasive sense of divinely sanctioned mission that Hizballah's leaders invoke when they insist that their movement is something other than a mere political party or militia. Hizballah's official spokesman maintains that the movement is "not a regimented party, in the common sense," for the idea of an exclusive "party" is foreign to Islam. Hizballah is a "mission" and a "way of life."² Another Hizballah leader has insisted that Hizballah "is not an organization," for its members carry no cards and bear no specific responsibilities. It is a "nation" of all who believe in the struggle against injustice and all who are loyal to Iran's Imam Khomeini.³ Still another Hizballah leader maintains that "we are not a party in the traditional sense of the term. Every Muslim is automatically a

London Press/Simon and Schuster, 1985) and Amir Taheri, *Holy Terror* (London: Century Hutchinson, 1987).

² Ibrahim al-Amin in *al-Harakat al-Islamiyya fi Lubnan* (Beirut, Dar al-Sa'iq, 1984), 145-6.

³ Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *al-Nahar al-arabi wal-dawali* (Beirut), 10 June 1985.

member of Hizballah, thus it is impossible to list our membership."⁴ And in the mind of Iran's chargé d'affaires in Beirut, Hizballah is not "restricted to a specified organizational framework. . . . There are two parties, Hizballah or God's party, and the Devil's party."⁵

The idea of Hizballah as a pure calling did approximate truth in the first few months after the movement emerged in 1982. But since then, Iran has worked to make Hizballah an increasingly structured, centralized, and accountable organization. It is now governed by a select consultative council (the Lebanon Council) and three regional councils (for the Biqa Valley, Beirut, and the South). Seven committees now divide administrative work among them. The consultative council, composed primarily of Lebanese Shi'ite clerics, acts with the advice and agreement of representatives of Iran. Hizballah's 4,000-man militia is increasingly structured, and new recruits pass through probationary membership before they are admitted to full membership.⁶

Still, as a revolutionary party, Hizballah seeks to maintain as much secrecy as possible about the nature of authority within the movement. Because of the growing use of Hizballah's name by persons acting without the authorization of the consultative council, Hizballah appointed a spokesman and published an official manifesto in February 1985.⁷ But Hizballah has made no other public acknowledgments concerning its structure. And although it is possible to compile a lengthy list of Lebanese Shi'ite clerics and others who are prominent in the movement's activities, it is impossible to assign to any of them a specific office within Hizballah.⁸ The avowed repudiation of formal structure, identified by

⁴Interview with Abbas al-Musawi, *La Revue du Liban* (Beirut), 27 July 1985.

⁵Interview with Mahmud Nurani, *Monday Morning* (Beirut), 14 January 1985.

⁶Some details on the structure of Hizballah, provided by sources within the movement, appear in *al-Shira* (Beirut), 17 March 1986. This account may be regarded as substantially accurate.

⁷The manifesto appeared in the form of an "open letter" to the "disinherited of Lebanon and the world." The letter first appeared as a pamphlet entitled *Nass al-mala al-mafkha allah waqabala Hizballah ala al-mustad'afin fi Lubnan wal-alam* (n.p. [Beirut], 26 Jumada II 1405/16 February 1985). An English translation appears in Augustus Richard Norton, *Amal and the Shi'a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 167-87. For a full discussion of Hizballah's principles of rule, see Martin Kramer, "Redeeming Jerusalem: The Pan-Islamic Premise of Hizballah," in David Menashen, ed., *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, forthcoming).

⁸This secrecy has recently come under the criticism of a member of Hizballah, who has compiled a new book on the movement's methods of mobilization. The argument here is that even the most secretive of Islamic movements, the Isma'ilis, made their leadership

Weber as a consistent feature of the charismatically oriented movement, sets Hizballah apart from the other large Lebanese factions, and particularly from the rival Shi'ite movement Amal, which is governed by an elaborate, formal hierarchy of elected and appointed officials.

But the refusal to acknowledge structure is deceptive. Hizballah is an overwhelmingly Shi'ite movement for the establishment of an Islamic state through the implementation of Islamic law. The authorities on that law are Shi'ite clerics—*ulama*—and they occupy roughly the same place of preeminence in Hizballah that the *ulama* occupy in Iran's ruling Islamic Republic Party. Among the *ulama* themselves there are informal yet complex patterns of deference. Hizballah began as a coalition of *ulama*, each of whom brought with him his circle of disciples; and although the movement's Iranian guides have sought to break down these intermediate allegiances in order to control the rank and file directly, the effort has met with only partial success. The individual adherent of Hizballah is likely to be a follower of the movement through a Lebanese Shi'ite cleric who serves as his guide. That cleric may himself be a follower of the movement through a cleric senior to him, and so on. These relationships, which extend at their highest levels to the Shi'ite world's foremost clerics in Iran and Iraq, provide Hizballah with enough informal structure to enforce a modicum of internal discipline, implement higher decisions, and raise needed funds.

There is also a parallel structure of authority in Hizballah, which is intrinsic to the large Shi'ite families of the Biqa Valley. The loyalty of these clans to Hizballah may owe more to intraclan alliances and rivalries than to Islamic commitment. Similarly, the pattern of identification with Hizballah in the Shi'ite villages of South Lebanon partly replicates established patterns of village loyalty. But in the southern suburbs of Beirut, where Shi'ites have shed their loyalties to clan and village, allegiance to Hizballah is generally expressed through submission to Shi'ite *ulama*. These thickly populated suburbs are now the most important bastion of Hizballah in Lebanon, and they constitute the movement's intellectual center.

The prominent *ulama* in Hizballah possess a collective élan rooted in a shared formative experience. Most are products of the once-great academies of learning in the Shi'ite shrine city of Najaf in Iraq. There, in a

known, at least to their own members. See Ali al-Kurani, *Tariqat Hizballah fil-amal al-*ulama** (Beirut: 1986).

setting of pious fastidiousness, they studied sacred law, theology, and philosophy, according to medieval pedagogical methods. From the late 1950s to the late 1970s, Najaf was also a place of great intellectual ferment, fueled by the fears of the *ulama* that their Islamic values and religious autonomy were threatened by Westernizing influences. Their response was to elaborate a theory of an Islamic state that could offer a satisfying alternative to the doctrines of nationalism and communism, which had made inroads even in Najaf. The *ulama* thought, lectured, and wrote on subjects such as Islamic government, Islamic economics, and the ideal Islamic state. The most notable of these theorists were Ayatollahs Muhsin al-Hakim and Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, both of Iraq, who had many Lebanese students. Their teachings received an important endorsement in 1965, with the arrival in Najaf of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who had been expelled from Iran for his agitation against the Shah's foreign and domestic policies. Khomeini spent the next thirteen years of his exile in Najaf. It was there, in 1970, that he delivered his landmark lectures on Islamic government and called on Muslim men of religion to lay exclusive claim to political rule.

All the Lebanese Shi'ite clerics who studied in Najaf during those years were indoctrinated to some extent with this ideal, at an impressionable moment and in austere conditions of intense Muslim piety. They came away from Najaf with a coherent criticism of the world as it is, an often revolutionary program for change, and friendships spanning the Shi'ite world of scholarship. The Iraqi security authorities have since cleared Najaf of its radical *ulama*, and some have been executed. But the personal and ideological ties forged there have never been stronger. It is the Najaf background of the leading Lebanese Shi'ite clerics in Hizballah that accounts for the movement's rapid and complete assimilation of the doctrines now championed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁹

This inculcated sense of sacred mission has led Hizballah to regard its struggle as transcending the narrow frontiers of Lebanon. For unlike the other armed factions, Hizballah cannot hope to attain its ultimate aim without defeating a constellation of external forces, all opposed more or less resolutely to the transformation of Lebanon into an Islamic republic. Foremost among them are the United States and Israel, which are abetted

⁹For the various Lebanese and Iraqi Shi'ite movements that trace their antecedents to Najaf, see Martin Kramer, "Muslim Statecraft and Subversion," *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, vol. 8: 1983-84 (Tel Aviv, 1986), 170-3.

by Arab regimes that are allegedly their dependencies. These are powerful adversaries, capable of intervening in Lebanon in countless ways, from centers of decision far beyond the limited reach of Hizballah.

The cause of warding off those who would thwart Hizballah's mission has been embraced by Islamic Jihad. Islamic Jihad claimed credit for the spectacular bombing attacks that helped to drive U.S. and Israeli forces out of Lebanon. Islamic Jihad has done much to purge Lebanon of foreign influence by waging a campaign of kidnapping against foreign nationals. It is difficult to say much that is authoritative about Islamic Jihad or to do more than speculate about the precise relationship between Hizballah and Islamic Jihad. Leading figures in Hizballah, as well as Hizballah's spokesman, disavow all knowledge of the persons behind Islamic Jihad. Western intelligence sources regard Islamic Jihad as a group of clandestine cells run by several of Hizballah's military commanders, in most instances in collaboration with Iran.¹⁰ But conventional thinking on this matter has changed more than once. Those communications issued by Islamic Jihad that are deemed to be authentic are too brief to open a window on this closed universe of belief and action. The few details about three young men known to have carried out suicide attacks claimed by Islamic Jihad are too scanty for any precise reconstruction of the group's methods or affiliations.¹¹

But Islamic Jihad need not interpret itself to the world, for this is done on its behalf and with great effectiveness by the leaders of Hizballah. Whatever the relationship of accountability between Islamic Jihad and Hizballah, their ideological compatibility finds daily expression in the public statements of Hizballah leaders. Husayn al-Musawi is the leader of Islamic Amal, a constituent part of Hizballah based in the Beqa Valley.

¹⁰ The most renowned of these commanders is Imad Mughniyya, a Lebanese Shi'ite who is now in Iran. Mughniyya's name has appeared in connection both with the bombing attacks and kidnappings against Americans in Lebanon, and he was reportedly one of four persons indicted in the United States for his planning of the TWA jet hijacking of June 1985. For an American intelligence assessment of his role and character ("He is a violent extremist capable of impetuously killing the [American] hostages. Yet he does not operate without constraints."), see Charles Allen to Vice Admiral John Poindexter, 9 September 1986, quoted in Report of the President's Special Review Board (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 26 February 1987), B-153, n. 90. An unusual opportunity to break the circle of secrecy surrounding Islamic Jihad was reportedly lost in late 1985, when Mughniyya passed through France, and French authorities did not act on a request from the United States that he be detained and prosecuted; *New York Times*, 14 March 1986.

¹¹ But new material is still appearing on the "martyrs." For the interesting interview with the parents of the young man who carried out the attack on the Israeli military headquarters in Tyre in November 1983, see *al-Ahd* (Beirut), 14 November 1986.

At times he has also been singled out in the media as one of the minds behind Islamic Jihad, a charge he has consistently denied. But he and his followers do claim to have given Islamic Jihad "political and moral support so that it would not look as if their actions were of a criminal nature. In this sense if it had not been for our propaganda, their actions would have been condemned by the public as criminal acts. We have tried to make the public understand that their action was in the nature of a jihad, launched by the oppressed against the oppressors."¹²

Husayn al-Musawi and other Hizballah leaders invest otherwise anonymous acts with meaning, transforming apparent crimes into sacred deeds. Hizballah's leaders justify the extraordinary operations carried out in the name of Islamic Jihad by constructing moral "logics," which are valid not only for the wider public but for themselves and perhaps even for Islamic Jihad. Among these leaders are some of Lebanon's foremost Shi'ite clerics, men respected and renowned for their learning in Islam and its incumbent obligations. With their support, Islamic Jihad need give little or no account of itself, and it has generally preferred not to do so. And through the strength and resourcefulness of their moral logic, the leaders of Hizballah have created a climate that promotes the kinds of operations that have consistently turned back Hizballah's enemies and placed an Islamic state within grasp.

Two categories of action have posed unique challenges to these leaders, precisely because they employ methods that on their face seem to violate some principle of Islamic law—the very law that Hizballah has championed as a solution to all of Lebanon's ills. These are the suicidal bomb attacks and the kidnappings of foreigners. The arguments within Hizballah over both these extraordinary means provide much insight into how morality, law, and necessity may be distorted and remade under the relentless pressures of great collective distress.

Hizballah's spokesmen

Before passing to the substance of the arguments advanced within Hizballah regarding these two issues, it is necessary to introduce those who will speak. All of them share a vision of an Islamic Lebanon. Yet each reached Hizballah through his own personal odyssey, and each has a distinctive perspective on the mission of Hizballah. Some are more senior

¹² Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *Kayhan* (Tehran), 29 July 1986.

in the struggle than others; some have wider followings than others; some are more independent of Iran and of other Hizballah leaders than others. And because all but one are Shi'ite clerics, they occupy different positions of rank in the informal hierarchy of Shi'ite learning.

In the Biqa Valley, where Hizballah operates in close collaboration with an Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps contingent, Hizballah leaders speak with the most uniform voice. Husayn al-Musawi, already mentioned earlier, is the only one who is not a cleric. Born in the village of Nabishir in the Biqa Valley, Husayn al-Musawi, now in his forties, is a former literature teacher who later served as an official in the Amal movement. One of his tasks was liaison with Iran, which he visited frequently. In 1982 when Amal leader Nabih Berri decided to join the National Salvation Committee, Husayn al-Musawi broke with Amal, made for the Biqa Valley, and there established Islamic Amal. This is now subsumed organizationally in Hizballah, although it apparently remains under the personal authority of Husayn al-Musawi.

Hizballah in the Biqa Valley is under the spiritual guidance of two young Shi'ite clerics, both products of the Shi'ite academies of Najaf in Iraq. Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli was born in 1948 in the village of Brital, also in the Biqa Valley. He spent nine years studying in Najaf and a brief time in Qom in Iran. Despite his youth, Tufayli enjoys considerable prestige as the Biqa Valley's most learned cleric. Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, born in 1952 in Nabishir, spent eight years in the same Najaf academy before coming to Ba'labakk in 1978. Now he teaches in a local academy which he helped to found. The Biqa Valley clerics have no pretensions to independent leadership. As Tufayli says, "Our relationship with the Islamic revolution [in Iran] is one of a junior to a senior . . . of a soldier to his commander."¹³

In Beirut, the official spokesman of Hizballah is Sayyid Ibrahim al-Amin, born in 1953 in the village of Nabi Ayla near Zahla. He was educated first in Najaf but more thoroughly in Qom, and he once represented Amal in Tehran. Like Husayn al-Musawi, he, too, broke with Amal in 1982, coming first to the Biqa Valley and later making his way to Beirut. He has worked very closely with officials of the Iranian embassy in Beirut and is an effective preacher in his own right.

It is significant that the man most often named as the spiritual leader of Hizballah denies not only the title but all formal connection with Hiz-

¹³ Interview with Tufayli, *Etela'at* (Tehran), 20 August 1985.

ballah. Nonetheless, Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah owes his political ascent in Lebanon to his undeniable influence over the movement. Fadlallah is the most senior Shi'ite cleric affiliated with Hizballah, and is unquestionably the most articulate and subtle advocate of Islamic Republicanism in Lebanon. Fadlallah was born in Najaf in 1935, but his father hailed from the village of Aynata in South Lebanon. In Najaf, Fadlallah studied under radical clerics, but he also felt the moderating influence of another teacher, Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim Kho'i, renowned for his apolitical devotion to scholarship. Fadlallah arrived in Beirut in 1966 and began a promising career in preaching, teaching, writing, and communal work. The Iranian revolution led Fadlallah to shed his political quietism. Following the Israeli invasion in 1982, he turned his pulpit into a platform for criticism of foreign involvement in Lebanon and appeals for the establishment of an Islamic republic.¹⁴

Fadlallah is a man of no small ambition who claims a following not only in Hizballah but in Amal and even among Shi'ites outside Lebanon. At the same time, his relationship with Hizballah's Iranian sponsors and guides has been a wary one, for his reading of the Lebanese situation has diverged significantly from theirs. It is Fadlallah's view that an Islamic Republic of Lebanon will be achieved later rather than sooner, given the certain opposition of several communities in Lebanon and their powerful foreign supporters.¹⁵ That opposition cannot be reduced solely through intimidation and violence, but it can be eroded gradually through a campaign of persuasion. Fadlallah himself aspires to be Lebanon's great persuader, a man of religion who stands above the mire of Lebanese militia politics and to whom all will eventually turn for mediation.

Fadlallah thus has no interest in being singled out as the leader, spiritual or otherwise, of Hizballah. Because a substantial part of Hizballah is influenced directly by the Iranians, he sees no reason to take on himself the burden of responsibility for Hizballah actions decided by others. And he does not wish to disqualify himself from a future role that might establish his authority far beyond the confines of Hizballah.¹⁶ So Fadlallah

¹⁴ For a fuller biographical account, see Martin Kramer, "Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah," *Orient* (Opladen, West Germany) 26, no. 2 (June 1985): 147-9. Some of Fadlallah's theoretical writings, mostly from the 1970s, have been examined in two articles by Olivier Carré: "Quelques mots-clés de Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah," *Revue française de science politique* 37, no. 4 (August 1987): 478-501; and "La 'révolution islamique' selon Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah," *Orient* 29, no. 1 (March 1988): 68-84.

¹⁵ For a revealing discussion of Fadlallah's differences with Iran, even over Iran's decision to promote the establishment of Hizballah, see al-Shira, 4 August 1986.

¹⁶ Fadlallah has taken the highly controversial position that there need not be only one final

has repeatedly declared that were he the leader of Hizballah, he would "have enough courage to own up to that fact. It is simply not so." This allows him to affirm that "I am not responsible for the behavior of any armed or unarmed group." And unlike those clerics who identify openly with Hizballah, Fadlallah does not regard the movement as different in kind from Lebanon's other militias: "Hizballah is a party, just like other parties in Lebanon which resort to the use of arms. It might be responsible for infractions and violations of the law, and they might have made mistakes, even though their mistakes are far less than those of others."¹⁷ Fadlallah avers that he has a following within Hizballah, but he rejects even the label of "spiritual guide" of the movement.¹⁸

Yet for all that, Fadlallah stands atop the informal hierarchy of clerics associated with Hizballah. He is senior to them all in his learning and status. They turn to him for guidance, and he is a regular fixture at Hizballah rallies. Many who are devoted first and foremost to Fadlallah fill the ranks of Hizballah, and adherents of Hizballah fill his mosque in the Bi'r al-Abid quarter of Beirut. Hizballah uses his mosque for gatherings, and it may be Hizballah that guarantees Fadlallah's personal security against would-be assassins. There are close ties of mutual dependence among Hizballah's leaders, their Iranian guides, and Fadlallah; for all the jealousies they arouse in one another, a sense of shared purpose binds them. Hizballah's adherents pledge their ultimate allegiance to the Imam Khomeini, but he cannot address his Lebanese following directly, for his Persian oratory cannot transcend the linguistic frontier. And so Iran depends on Fadlallah's brilliant Arabic rhetoric to carry the message of Islamic republicanism to Hizballah. He is an imperfect medium, for Fadlallah has his own agenda; but no other Lebanese Shi'ite cleric comes close to rendering the service as effectively as he does.

There are many other noteworthy clerics affiliated with Hizballah. They include Shaykh Muhammad Isma'il Khaliq (Ayatollah Montazeri's representative in Lebanon and founder of an Islamic academy in Beirut), Shaykh Zuhayr Kanj (leader of a Hizballah-backed coalition of clerics), Shaykh Mahir Hammud (a Sunni from Sidon and a leader of that same

source of Shi'ite authority in matters of religious law; interview with Fadlallah, *al-Shira*, 26 May 1986. Fadlallah seems to be making a preliminary argument for a diffusion of authority that would allow him to stand as an equal to Khomeini's successor. Publication of this interview is said to have angered Iranian officials in Beirut.

¹⁷ Interviews with Fadlallah, *Monday Morning*, 15 October 1984; *al-Nabaa* (Beirut), 3 October 1984.

¹⁸ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Itihad al-ushu'i* (Abu Dhabi), 30 January 1986.

coalition), Shaykh Muhammad Yazbak (founder of an Islamic academy in Ba'albak), Sayyid Hasan Nasrallah (now very active in mobilizing Beirut Shi'ites for the struggle in the South), as well as a number of preachers in the towns and villages of South Lebanon. A complete analysis of Hizballah would take their opinions into account as well, but they tend to offer interpretations received from the movement's more visible representatives.

Suicide and martyrdom

Hizballah owes much of its reputation in the wider world to the unprecedented wave of suicidal bombings carried out by Lebanese Shi'ites from the spring of 1983 to the summer of 1985. These attacks were directed against U.S., French, and Israeli targets in Lebanon, and they met with astonishing success in bringing about policy reassessments by all these extraneous powers. In the best-planned of these operations, individual suicide bombers caused tens and even hundreds of casualties. Responsibility for most of the bombings was claimed by Islamic Jihad, and prominent figures affiliated with Hizballah were careful to disavow any involvement in the attacks. Nonetheless, it was Hizballah that most directly benefited from the suicide operations. The movement's own military capabilities were still very limited, and its militia had yet to take effective form. Yet the spectacular bombings suggested that religious fervor could compensate for small numbers and that Hizballah commanded a kind of devotion from its adherents that no other militia could claim. Hizballah could no longer be ignored. Its leading figures sought to assure this recognition even as they distanced themselves personally from the attacks, by justifying the operations as though they were Hizballah's own.

In one sense, it was an uncomplicated moral logic that justified the highly effective October 1983 suicide attacks against the U.S. and French contingents of the Multinational Force (MNF) in Beirut. Although he invariably denied any personal involvement in the attacks, Islamic Amal's Husayn al-Musawi saw the attacks as defensive acts against foreign occupation. "Even if we, the people of Islamic Amal, do not have relations with those who committed these attacks, we are nevertheless on the side of those who defend themselves, by whatever means they have chosen."¹⁹ In his view, the MNF was a military force committed to armed struggle

¹⁹ Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *Le Monde*, 2 November 1983.

against Lebanon's Muslims, a view held widely in Beirut's southern suburbs and widely preached by Shi'ite clerics in mosque sermons throughout the country. "I accept these attacks," declared Musawi. "The French and Americans came to Beirut to help the Phalangists and Israelis—our enemies—against the Muslims. They evacuated the Palestinians to enable the Israelis to enter Beirut."²⁰ Musawi denied knowing any members of Islamic Jihad, which claimed credit for the attacks. But he would later declare, "I supported their glorious attacks against the U.S. and French forces in Lebanon. I have said repeatedly that I have no connection with them, but we respect them and we support them fully and we bow our heads to the greatness of their work."²¹

The Hizballah leader in the Biqa Valley, Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, felt justified in declaring that the attacks "represented the opinion of all Muslims. The MNF should not have acted the way it did. When you knock on someone's door, you must wait for an answer before entering."²² For Sayyid Ibrahim al-Amin, spokesman of Hizballah in Beirut, this aggressive intrusion was part of a "war" with the United States, which had "transformed Lebanon into a military test laboratory for their advanced weapons." It was "our right to rise up against our enemies," and the October 1983 attacks "deserve proper recognition, homage, and deference," for they were "unprecedented in the history of mankind."²³ Hizballah's leaders deemed the MNF a hostile force in time of war, not a neutral force dispatched to preserve peace. Therefore, attacks against the MNF were military operations against an enemy, not acts of terrorism against political neutrals. And as spectacularly successful military operations, the attacks were widely applauded, not only by Hizballah but by other Lebanese factions as well as by Iran and Syria. When attacks launched against Israeli forces in Lebanon enjoyed comparable success, they met with similar accolades.

The more complicated moral issue from Hizballah's point of view concerned the method of the attacks, which depended on the premeditated sacrifice by Muslims of their own lives. The frequency with which this issue was addressed by Shi'ite clerics following the attacks suggests that resort to this method did not meet with universal approbation within Hizballah, because of the strong Islamic prohibition against suicide.²⁴

²⁰ Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *Le Figaro*, 12 September 1986.

²¹ Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *Kayhan*, 29 July 1986.

²² Interview with Abbas al-Musawi, *La Revue du Liban*, 27 July 1983.

²³ Interview with Ibrahim al-Amin, *Kayhan*, 19 October 1985.

²⁴ The accepted theological view is that suicide is a grave sin, and the person who commits

Some activists were also distressed that the method tended to obscure the message, because the many psychologists called upon to interpret the attacks suggested clinical rather than political interpretations for the motives of the perpetrators. These interpretations had some effect in the Shi'ite street, where it was rumored that the terrorists who had carried out the operations were possibly disturbed, making it necessary for Islamic Jihad to conceal their identities even after the attacks. If this had been the case, Islamic Jihad's operational planners had exploited the psychological distress of unbalanced youngsters, who had acted without the full possession of their faculties.

Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah gave this issue the most systematic exposition in his interviews, speeches, and sermons. It was a subject he could not avoid, yet one that had to be addressed in cautious terms. Reports by the intelligence branches of the Lebanese army and the Lebanese Forces (Phalanges), which were leaked to the American press, had Fadlallah granting religious dispensation to the attackers on the eve of their mission.²⁵ He denied this accusation immediately and consistently, as the inevitable preface to his analysis of the moral implications of the attacks. This he made from the point of view of an interpreter of religious law, to whom persons both within and beyond Hizballah turned for judgment on the moral admissibility of the method employed in the operations.

Fadlallah's initial declaratory position was one of ambivalence toward the attacks. One of his professed doubts was strictly situational. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, he expressed concern about possible retaliation against the southern suburbs and about the likelihood that the bombings might drive the United States to adopt a still more aggressive posture. The attacks were liable to create "a climate that makes it easier for imperialism to implement its plans. This is what happened with the two explosions. The United States benefited from them in invading Grenada and in exerting political pressure in Lebanon to further its interests."²⁶ But Fadlallah's concerns about the effect of the attacks on the resolve of the United States were soon dissipated; it rapidly became clear that the attacks had shattered that resolve and hastened the withdrawal of the MNF. Yet Fadlallah was still left with the complex moral and legal

suicide is doomed to continual repetition in Hell of the action by which he killed himself. Franz Rosenthal, "On Suicide in Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 66 (1946): 243, 245.

²⁵ The original story appeared in the *Washington Post*, 28, 30 October 1983.

²⁶ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Kharj* (Sharjah), 14 November 1983.

issue of the method employed in the attacks, especially because he and other Shi'ite clerics who looked to him for guidance were besieged by believers' questions. Some of these wanted an explicit judgment based on religious law—a *fatwa*—sanctioning the method of suicidal attack.

Fadlallah knew the nuances of the law: He did not hesitate to declare that, "based on my individual interpretation of Islamic law, I have reservations about resorting to suicidal tactics in political action."²⁷ And so Fadlallah resisted all pressures to rule decisively on the matter. Although he publicly commented on the merit of individual operations, he generally avoided any blanket endorsement of the method, which remained highly problematic from the point of view of religious law. "In many cases, I stated that these martyrdom operations are not justified, except in very difficult cases. I can say that I have not issued any *fatwa* since the beginning of these operations and up to now. On the contrary, I am one of those who stood against all this commotion for *fatwas*. Despite the positive points which come out of this action, I believe that there are many negative points."²⁸ But this went without saying; it was his own philosophical assumption that "naturally, there is a positive aspect and a negative aspect to every event in the world,"²⁹ and "there is evil in everything good and something good in every evil."³⁰ No act of violence could be justified or condemned without knowledge of specific context. Having considered the specific circumstances of the operations, Fadlallah eventually gave them the fullest possible endorsement short of an explicit *fatwa*.

First, he said, no other means remained to the Muslims to confront the massive power commanded by the United States and Israel. In the absence of any other alternative, unconventional methods became admissible and perhaps even necessary. "If an oppressed people does not have the means to confront the United States and Israel with the weapons in which they are superior, then they possess unfamiliar weapons. . . . Oppression makes the oppressed discover new weapons and new strength every day."³¹ The method itself redressed a gross imbalance in the capabilities of the competing forces. "When a conflict breaks out between oppressed nations and imperialism, or between two hostile governments, the parties to the conflict seek ways to complete the elements of their

²⁷ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Khaleq*, 14 November 1981.

²⁸ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Mustaqbal* (Paris), 6 July 1985.

²⁹ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Nabih al-urabi wa'l-dawlati*, 21 July 1986.

³⁰ Fadlallah Friday sermon, *al-Ahd*, 6 December 1985.

³¹ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Fitnah* (Abu Dhabi), 7 June 1985.

power and to neutralize the weapons used by the other side. For example, the oppressed nations do not have the technology and destructive weapons America and Europe have. They must thus fight with special means of their own. [We] recognize the right of nations to use every unconventional method to fight these aggressor nations, and do not regard what oppressed Muslims of the world do with primitive and unconventional means to confront aggressor powers as terrorism. We view this as religiously lawful warfare against the world's imperialist and domineering powers."¹² The imbalance of power, coupled with the obligation of self-defense, therefore necessitated extraordinary and unconventional methods of waging war, because the oppressed stood at a distinct disadvantage in any face-to-face confrontation with the formidable forces of imperialism.

But although Fadlallah had established the need for unconventional methods, this did not constitute a clear endorsement of those unconventional methods that might also be in conflict with Islamic law, such as the self-destructive attack. One could not simply argue extenuating circumstances to a constituency devoted to the implementation of Islamic law. Here Fadlallah's argumentation became subtle. "These initiatives," he insisted, "must be placed in their context." If the aim of such a combatant "is to have a political impact on an enemy whom it is impossible to fight by conventional means, then his sacrifice can be part of a jihad, a religious war. Such an undertaking differs little from that of a soldier who fights and knows that in the end he will be killed. The two situations lead to death; except that one fits in with the conventional procedures of war, and the other does not."¹³ Fadlallah, denying he had told anyone to "blow yourself up," did affirm that "the Muslims believe that you struggle by transforming yourself into a living bomb like you struggle with a gun in your hand. There is no difference between dying with a gun in your hand or exploding yourself."¹⁴

This point would ultimately constitute the crux of Fadlallah's argument: Deaths in suicide bombings are no different from more commonplace deaths of soldiers who enter battle knowing that some of them will

¹² Interview with Fadlallah, *Kayhan*, 14 November 1985; oppressed peoples "do not consider anything forbidden in the pursuit of these objectives. The legitimacy of every means stems from the legitimacy of the end sought"; interview with Fadlallah, *al-Majallah* (London), 1 October 1986.

¹³ Interview with Fadlallah, *Politique internationale* (Paris) 29 (Autumn 1983): 268.

¹⁴ Interview with Fadlallah, *Middle East Insight* (Washington, D.C.) 4, no. 2 (June-July 1985): 10-11.

not return but confident that their sacrifice will advance the common cause. "What is the difference between setting out for battle knowing you will die *after* killing ten [of the enemy], and setting out to the field to kill ten and knowing you will die *while* killing them?" Fadlallah argued that there was no difference. This the psychologists failed to understand. They had explained the operations as the necessary result of the "brain-washing" of the bombers, who had been "suspended in air in a magical paradise." But the psychologists knew nothing of oppression and how it moved men, for "he who has never known hunger in his life cannot understand the cries of hunger." There are Muslims who have set the aim of changing a certain political situation, and even if they die in doing so, their cause is advanced. The death of such persons is not a tragedy, nor does it indicate an "agitated mental state." Such a death is calculated; far from being a death of despair, it is a purposeful death in the service of a living cause. The suicide drivers who reportedly went "grinning" to their deaths were not contemplating paradise, as the media imagined, but were rejoicing in their hearts that they were able to advance their cause one step forward.¹⁵

Fadlallah thus retrospectively sanctioned operations that he believed had served the interests of Islam and had been carried out with full awareness of their purpose and consequences. But he himself would not issue a *fatwa*; nor would he acknowledge having sanctioned any operation in advance. He simply indicated that he had been approached by those willing to make such a sacrifice out of a full awareness and that these supplicants had been difficult to dissuade.¹⁶

Fadlallah's moral logic thus rested on two opposite but complementary assertions. The Muslims had just cause and need to resort to extraordinary means; yet the suicide bombings were not that extraordinary after all, and his closer analysis revealed that those Muslims who perished in such attacks died deaths that did not differ from battlefield deaths. These were the complex mechanisms of moral disengagement that permitted Islamic Jihad, in good conscience, to recruit and deploy young men in suicidal missions. Unlike simple mechanisms of disengagement, which

¹⁵ Fadlallah lecture was delivered on 18 July 1984 and published in pamphlet form under the title *al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya fi-Jurub ual-Baq al-gharbi wa-Rashaya* (n.p., n.d.), 16–19; it was also reproduced in the collection of Fadlallah's sermons and lectures entitled *al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya: afay wa-tarikh* (Beirut, 1986), 48–51.

¹⁶ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Majallah*, 1 October 1986. Here, too, Fadlallah criticized the American use of "psychologists and sociologists to come up with sensational phrases that will be popular with world public opinion."

culminate in dehumanization of "the other,"¹⁷ these complex mechanisms allowed Hizballah's clerics to sanction the sacrifice of indisputably human—Muslim—lives. It was the specificity of those lives that posed the moral dilemma. Whereas a commander may know for certain that some of the soldiers in his charge may die in a conventional operation, he cannot know who among them will perish. It is God's will, or fate, or random luck that determines who will die, relieving the commander of direct and personal responsibility. But in the operations conceived by the commanders of Islamic Jihad, it was impossible to displace responsibility by the same simple process of dissociation. The clerics of Hizballah thus fashioned the necessarily complex logic that reached its highest refinement in the intellectualized reflections of Fadlallah.

Indeed, the moral logic of Fadlallah may have been too refined for Hizballah's rank and file, for his ideas were often simplified in the pronouncements of lesser clerics. A lesser cleric in Hizballah explained that suicide operations could neither be sanctioned nor banned absolutely, because their admissibility depended on circumstances and every Muslim was under a religious obligation to preserve his own life if possible. But those who carried out attacks for the good of Islam would go to paradise, and "we believe that those who carried out suicide operations against the enemy are indeed in paradise."¹⁸ In contrast, Fadlallah never made explicit reference to the fate of the souls of those Muslims who died in the attacks. And others did not believe, as Fadlallah did, that his intellectual justifications were an adequate substitute for a formal legal ruling by a Muslim religious authority. According to one lesser cleric in Hizballah, acts of "self-martyrdom" (*istishhad*, as opposed to suicide, *intihar*) "were carried out by our youth under our inspiration. Some came to consult me about acts of self-martyrdom. I explained to them that this requires a *fatwa* from one of the highest authorities, that is, the Imams Kho'i or Khomeini, for a believer will do nothing without giving consideration to the principles of law." Three known men who carried out suicide operations against Israeli forces in South Lebanon were named as having "martyred themselves in accord with a *fatwa*."¹⁹ For these acts to be accepted as legitimate, many in Hizballah found intellectual justifications

¹⁷ For the crucial role of moral disengagement in terrorism, see Albert Bandura's article in this volume (Chapter 9).

¹⁸ Interview with Shaykh Ali Yaun, *al-Laws* (Beirut), 9 July 1984. This person, originally from Majdal Salim, directs an Islamic institute in Tyre.

¹⁹ Interview with Shaykh Yasuf Da'mush, *al-Saqr* (Beirut), 14 August 1986. This person is the prayer leader of the village of al-Saksakiyya.

necessary but not sufficient; hence the popular clamor for formal *fatwas*, to which Fadlallah himself alluded. Still, the logic of such *fatwas* would not have differed in kind from the public statements by Fadlallah and Hizballah's other leaders justifying the suicide operations.

Following the withdrawal of the MNF and successive Israeli redeployments southward, the options for operations that would produce a high number of enemy casualties diminished. As time passed, similar operations were undertaken by groups that were not aligned ideologically with Hizballah. And because of various countermeasures, potential targets of such attacks became more difficult to reach and destroy, and some attempts took a significant toll in innocent Lebanese lives. At the same time, the fighters of Hizballah began to benefit from improved Iranian training in the Biqa Valley and were able to launch effective conventional operations against the South Lebanon Army.⁴⁰

Under these altered circumstances, the method of the suicidal bombing attack was set aside. By late 1985, Fadlallah confirmed the change in approach: "We believe that suicide operations should only be carried out if they can bring about a political or military change in proportion to the passions that incite a person to make of his body an explosive bomb." Fadlallah deemed past operations against Israeli forces "successful in that they significantly harmed the Israelis. But the present circumstances do not favor such operations anymore, and attacks that only inflict limited casualties (on the enemy) and destroy one building should not be encouraged, if the price is the death of the person who carries them out."⁴¹ Fadlallah, in essence, admitted that the legitimacy of this extraordinary method rested ultimately on its extraordinary success. When such success could no longer be assured, the many reservations that had been submerged beneath his moral logic reasserted themselves. Fadlallah and the Shi'ite clerics of Hizballah, men conscious of the dictates of Islamic law, could never allow that the mere success of these operations was their own justification. But once spectacular success began to prove elusive, all other arguments collapsed. Such attacks, done on what Fadlallah once described as "the Islamic pattern,"⁴² were discontinued, and the issue ceased to figure in the running public commentary by the leaders of Hizballah.

⁴⁰For Hizballah's own assessment of its military capabilities in the South (where it had about 500 men under arms), see *al-Ahd*, 12 December 1986.

⁴¹Interview with Fadlallah, Monday Morning, 16 December 1985. The Tyre and Merula operations were those regarded as "successful."

⁴²Interview with Fadlallah, *Kayhan*, 14 November 1985. Fadlallah specifically mentions the attacks on the MNF and the bombing of the "two Israeli spy centers."

Nevertheless, Sayyid Ibrahim al-Amin warned in 1986 that "suicidal operations may be used again" if opportunities presented themselves.⁴³ Hizballah's organization of a successful suicide bombing against Israeli forces in South Lebanon in October 1988 signalled that the method had been abandoned for tactical rather than moral reasons, and that it might be revived in changing circumstances.

Innocent hostages and Islamic morality

In July 1982, David Dodge, an American administrator at the American University of Beirut, was kidnapped by Lebanese Shi'ites with strong ties to Iran. Hostage taking had been part of the political repertoire of virtually all Lebanon's militias, but these had acted only against one another in order to intimidate opponents or to win the release of hostages held by Lebanese rivals. Foreigners felt secure from such assault, because they were not regarded by the local political factions as parties to the civil war for Lebanon. But the growth of Islamic republicanism among Lebanon's Shi'ites ended the idyll. Many of the foreigners in Lebanon were nationals of the United States and France, countries denounced by Iran as enemies of the cause of Islamic revolution in Iran, the Persian Gulf, and Lebanon. After the Dodge kidnapping, citizens of the United States and France were subjected to an intimidating campaign of hostage taking, done in part in the name of Islamic Jihad. As in the case of the suicide bombings, Hizballah's leaders consistently denied any knowledge of the persons or groups behind this campaign. But much evidence indicates that those who waged the campaign of hostage taking and hijacking were under the influence, and sometimes the control, of Iran and Hizballah.

Hostage taking and hijackings have served the cause of Islamic republicanism in Lebanon in many ways. First, the soldiers of the Islamic revolution do fall from time to time into hostile hands, and one way to secure their release is to seize and exchange hostages for Islam's prisoners of war—even when those prisoners are held elsewhere, as in the case of the Shi'ites under sentence in Kuwait for bombings committed in December 1983. The Lebanese Shi'ite who has directly controlled many of the American and some of the French hostages in Lebanon is reportedly a brother-in-law of one of the Kuwait prisoners, and his consistent demand has been their release. Second, hostages can conceivably be exchanged

⁴³Interview with Amin, *Kayhan*, 9 February 1986.

for political or economic concessions from enemy governments; some have already been traded for U.S. arms and frozen Iranian assets. Third, the systematic taking of hostages may have the effect of driving out foreigners who come to fear for their safety. Their exodus undermines the security of local opponents who rely on foreign support and makes it more difficult for foreign spies to operate against the Islamic revolutionary party. Fourth, the holder of hostages may enjoy an immunity from attack or retaliation as long as hostages are under his roof. Fifth, the holding of hostages can make a great power appear helpless, boosting morale within the revolutionary movement. And last, the holding of hostages can bring wide attention to forms of injustice that go unnoticed unless they are dramatized.

But when hostages are innocent of all wrongdoing and are simply the means to an end, men who profess an absolute allegiance to law face a difficult dilemma. The seizure of innocents cannot be readily reconciled with Islamic law, even with the Islamic law of war. And because these acts are undertaken in the name of an Islamic cause, there is always the possibility that even fair-minded people will equate hostage taking and hijacking with Islam itself, thus doing damage to the image of Islam as a religion of tolerance and justice. Finally, as in the case of the suicide bombings, there is the ever-present danger that the method will obscure the message—that sympathy for the hostages will destroy all empathy for the Muslims whose victimization first prompted the hostage taking or hijacking.

Once again it fell to Hizballah to articulate a moral logic, this time for seizing and threatening the lives of foreigners. The simplest justification was to say that foreigners taken hostage were themselves guilty of some transgression against the Muslims, specifically that they were spies. According to Shaykh Subhi al-Tufayli, "Imperialism has agents and spies throughout the world. It is our right and the right of every person in the world to follow the moves of such agents and to arrest those who have been indicted." Such agents could hide behind a diplomatic or cultural guise, and arresting them was a matter of self-defense.⁴⁴ Husayn al-Musawi also approved of kidnappings "if the hostages are spies and agents and are there for mischief against Muslims."⁴⁵ But this justification was necessarily thin. For by its logic, all those taken hostage and then discovered not to be spies should have been released. And no one was so cred-

⁴⁴ Interview with Tufayli, *al-Itihad al-ushb'i*, 4 December 1986.

⁴⁵ Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *al-Itihad*, 12 December 1986.

ulous as to believe that all the foreign hostages—including the hijacked passengers of TWA Flight 847 and persons snatched at random on West Beirut's streets—were indeed spies. The prolonged detention of foreigners who were personally innocent demanded a more complex justification.

Even the official spokesman of Hizballah had difficulty producing one. When Sayyid Ibrahim al-Amin was asked how Islamic law interpreted the kidnapping of foreign diplomats and journalists, he said that this was not his business and that the kidnappers themselves should be "asked about the question of Islamic law in this matter."⁴⁶ This kind of evasion did not befit a Shi'ite cleric, who is generally expected to have his own interpretation or to adopt an interpretation of a scholar whom he regards as more learned. Husayn al-Musawi also knew of no unequivocal justification in Islamic law for such an act. When asked about the Islamic view of holding innocents, he simply replied that "it is the same as with alcohol. Alcohol is forbidden under Islam, but when it is a medicine you are allowed to take as much as you need for your recovery."⁴⁷ It was a weak analogy, but Husayn al-Musawi had no schooling in Islamic law.

A cleric with Hizballah affiliations argued that the hostages were taken in order to assure the freedom of Muslim peoples from the "captivity" of colonialism. "Just as freedom is demanded for a handful of Europeans, it is also demanded for the millions of Muslims."⁴⁸ Yet it was well known that the most important demand of the hostage holders was the release of specific groups of Shi'ite Muslims held by Israel and Kuwait. Hizballah's own official statements regarding the TWA hijacking and the holding of French and American hostages simply argued that these acts were justifiable because of "extenuating circumstances." The TWA hijacking was sanctioned because it "awakened human consciences" to Israel's "abduction" of 700 Shi'ite detainees to "occupied Palestine." How could the United States approve of Israel's action, yet criticize the hijackers for holding only 40 hostages?⁴⁹ As for the kidnapping of Americans and Frenchmen, Hizballah determined that both countries had attempted to "drive the oppressed up against the wall," and their victims had "no other choice than to adopt this means."⁵⁰ Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi said

⁴⁶ Interview with Ibrahim al-Amin, *al-Majallah*, 19 March 1986.

⁴⁷ DPA (Beirut), 4 February 1987; quoted in *Daily Report: Middle East and Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Broadcast Information Service—FBIS), 5 February 1987.

⁴⁸ Interview with Sadiq al-Musawi, *al-Nabih al-ʿarabi ʿaṣf-d-duaʿi*, 28 July 1986.

⁴⁹ Hizballah statement, *al-Safir*, 29 June 1985.

⁵⁰ AFP (Beirut), 13 May 1986; quoted in FBIS, 14 May 1986.

the same, when asked whether the "oppressed" were responsible for the hostage taking: "Only the United States, France and Israel are responsible, since they provoke such actions by their hateful policy toward the Muslim people and their barbaric practices, the consequences of which they must accept."¹¹

The thinness of this logic demonstrated a lack of intellectual resourcefulness and legal acumen—those very qualities that so clearly distinguished Fadlallah from Hizballah's other clerics and rendered him so indispensable to the movement. But Fadlallah himself would not provide a compelling moral logic for the hostage taking and kidnapping, because he had reached the conclusion that neither could be justified on Islamic moral and legal grounds. The sanction Fadlallah had bestowed upon the self-sacrificing bomber he withheld from the kidnapper and hijacker of innocents.

It was true that there were positive aspects to such acts; Fadlallah did not abandon his principle that "there is evil in everything good and something good in every evil." The Islamic movement indisputably benefited from using the hostages to exert pressure on the United States and France and force them to alter their policies.¹² Important issues were brought before world public opinion that otherwise would have been ignored.¹³ These were pragmatic arguments in favor of the acts, but they could also be justified in limited moral terms. Those responsible for the hijacking of the TWA flight and the kidnapping of foreigners were in a "tight spot," anxious for the safe release of their own relatives; theirs was also a humanitarian cause. And who were the Americans and French to preach against hostage taking and hijacking—those who set up the kidnapping of Ben Barka and hijacked the plane of Ben Bella?¹⁴

The intractability of the hostage problem became the fault of the Americans, who created a deadlock by turning an apolitical bid for the release of relatives into a matter of principle in an American war against terrorism. Fadlallah saw the problem of kidnapped foreigners in the same light as the problem of kidnapped Lebanese: "We know that those who kidnap a Lebanese citizen in East or West Beirut do so in order to obtain the release of another kidnapped person." So it was when foreigners in

¹¹ Interview with Abbas al-Musawi, *La Revue du Liban*, 27 July 1985.

¹² Interview with Fadlallah, *La Vanguardia* (Barcelona), 9 November 1986; quoted in FBIS, 17 November 1986.

¹³ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Nahar al-ʿarabi wa-l-dawlati*, 21 July 1986.

¹⁴ Interviews with Fadlallah, *al-Nahar al-ʿarabi wa-l-dawlati*, 1 July 1985; *al-Mustaqbal*, 6 July 1985; *al-Itrah al-shuʿbi*, 30 January 1986.

Lebanon were first kidnapped.⁵⁵ Had the Americans dealt with the matter in "a practical way," by accepting an exchange "according to the Lebanese practice," the hostage affair "would have ended and its file would have been closed without further suffering." Instead, the Americans hopelessly complicated the affair by placing it in the realm of international terrorism. The U.S. government could then use the hostage issue to generate a "political and security program" against the "Islamic movement" and then exploit it as a means to reopen a dialogue with Iran.⁵⁶

Yet when all was said and done, Fadlallah's verdict went against the hijackers and hostage takers. His simplest objection was that these actions harmed the image of Islam and seriously undermined his own campaign to persuade all and sundry that an Islamic Lebanon would be a more just and equitable Lebanon, for Christian and Muslim alike. Opposition to Islamic republicanism fed on the perception of Islam as a faith of fanatic extremism. Fadlallah lamented that "in Western public opinion, it has become popular to think that terrorism is linked to the revival of Islam, and that extremism and related violence are natural Islamic traits, revealing the true face of the religion."⁵⁷ Fadlallah sought to dispel this image of Islam through a brilliant combination of candor and guile.

Since the deeds of hijackers and hostage takers seemed bold and courageous to many in Hizballah, Fadlallah first had to make the "nation" of Hizballah aware of their cost. Particular targets of hostage takers and even assassins were the faculty members of the American University of Beirut (AUB), an institution considered by many in Hizballah to be a bastion of corrupting influence. Fadlallah agreed that a conflict existed between the "Western system of education" and "Islamic ideology," but the haphazard kidnapping of professors would not bring about AUB's closure, and it cast Islam in an utterly negative light. The proper approach was to transform the university by transforming its students, through the confident preaching of Islam's message.⁵⁸

Other common targets of hostage takers were the foreign correspondents stationed in Beirut; there was a widespread suspicion in Hizballah that hostile spies made extensive use of journalistic cover. But Fadlallah saw the role of journalists as an essential one in his campaign of persua-

⁵⁵ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Hawadith* (London), 13 February 1987.

⁵⁶ Interviews with Fadlallah, *al-Ra'y al-Amm* (Kuwait), 3 April 1986; *al-Nahar al-Arabi* (Beirut), 9 February 1987.

⁵⁷ Fadlallah, "Islam and Violence in Political Reality," *Middle East Insight* 4, nos. 4-5 (1986): 7.

⁵⁸ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Khaliq*, 28 June 1986.

sion. Foreign journalists often sought him out, making him one of Lebanon's most interviewed personalities and providing Hizballah with access to readers and viewers throughout the world. In this light, the kidnapping of foreign journalists was positively harmful to the cause, even if there were some spies among them. In one instance, Terry Anderson, the bureau chief of the Associated Press in Beirut, was kidnapped "a day after he had interviewed me,"⁶¹ a move that Fadlallah obviously regarded as a personal affront because it threatened his own easy access to the press. "We should help journalists in their task to inform, whatever the negative aspects may be."⁶²

But Fadlallah invoked a more consequential logic for his stand, in his capacity as an authoritative interpreter of Islam's moral and legal precepts. The hijacking and kidnapping of innocent persons constituted wrongful punishment and contradicted the teachings of Islam. It was "forbidden to kidnap or kill an innocent person because one has a score to settle with a head of state."⁶³ The Qur'an taught that no one should take on himself the burden of another soul, that "if a father commits a sin you are not permitted to punish his son, because God has made everyone responsible for what he has done." Fadlallah explicitly defined hijacking and kidnapping as "inhumane and irreligious" and an "un-Islamic method." For all anyone knew, the victims "might be opposed to the regime against which the hijacking operation is directed" and "opposed to the policies of their own governments." These innocent persons bore no responsibility for the wrongs done to the Muslims. What was their crime? If they were indeed spies, as hostage takers sometimes claimed, they should immediately be tried for espionage. If they were not spies, they should be released, not bartered. Fadlallah adhered to this position not only in interviews with journalists but in his Friday sermons from the pulpit of his own mosque in Beirut's southern suburbs. He not only denied allegations of personal involvement in these acts but declared, "I would not have any self-respect if I had anything to do with them."⁶⁴

Indeed, Fadlallah claimed to be actively working for the release of

⁶¹ Interview with Fadlallah, *Kayhan International* (Tehran), 23 July 1985.

⁶² Fadlallah on kidnapping of French television journalists, AFP (Beirut), 12 March 1986; quoted in FBIS, 12 March 1986.

⁶³ Fadlallah on fate of a French television journalist, AFP (Beirut), 15 March 1987; quoted in FBIS, 16 March 1987.

⁶⁴ Fadlallah, "Islam and Violence in Political Reality"; interviews with Fadlallah, *al-Nahar al-ʿarabi wal-sharʿi*, 1 July 1985; *Kayhan International*, 23 July 1985; *Kayhan*, 14 November 1985; *al-Manallah*, 25 December 1985; Fadlallah Friday sermon, *al-Ahd*, 6 December 1985.

hostages, and he met with the many mediators who clamored to see him. His purpose, he declared, was to "create a psychological situation that would bring pressure to bear on the kidnappers themselves."⁶³ Fadlallah's denial of sanction for these acts left the justifications to Hizballah's lesser clerics, who were not up to the task and were reluctant to challenge directly Fadlallah's more authoritative reading of Islamic precepts. And so the hostage takers themselves were forced to plead their own case in any way they could, usually through letters to the Lebanese press and videotapes of the hostages reading messages from the captors. These became more lengthy and frequent, but they could not match the eloquent locutions of Fadlallah.

And so consensus eluded Hizballah regarding the extraordinary means of hostage taking. Fadlallah's preaching created a moral dilemma for Hizballah and necessitated a more careful reformulation of Hizballah's own position. Husayn al-Musawi continued to support the kidnapping of "spies or military personnel," actions that were "undoubtedly useful" to the cause. But hostage taking had gotten out of hand after "some excited Muslims in Beirut" began to take "anyone off the streets." No good had come of these ill-conceived operations, and Muslims were now widely regarded as kidnappers. Hostage taking had become "chaotic," overshadowing and tarnishing "the major acts of hostage taking which were done to serve the nation of Hizballah." Musawi's was a plea for discriminate rather than indiscriminate hostage taking, in accord with what he called "Islamic decision-making"—a euphemism in Hizballah's lexicon for Iran.⁶⁴ Musawi even reached the conclusion that if hostages were innocent, then "I am against hostage taking, even if the captives are American or French."⁶⁵ Subhi al-Tufayli also concluded that the hostage situation "harms the Islamic cause."⁶⁶

The growing unease in Hizballah over the method of hostage taking had its origins in the moral logic of Fadlallah, who sought to serve as the movement's unacknowledged conscience. But if hostage deals should ever begin to provide substantial benefits to Hizballah, that may force a change in his moral logic by altering perceptions of cost and benefit in hostage taking. Fadlallah responded to the spectacular success of the suicide

⁶³ Interview with Fadlallah, *al-Hawadith*, 27 March 1987.

⁶⁴ Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *Kayhan*, 29 July 1986.

⁶⁵ Interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *al-Ithad*, 12 December 1986. Still, he favored the "abduction and trial" of Presidents Reagan and Mitterrand; interview with Husayn al-Musawi, *al-Nahar*, 1 November 1985.

⁶⁶ Tufayli on kidnapping, AEP (Beirut), 30 March 1987; quoted in FBIS, 31 March 1987.

bombings by overcoming his "reservations" and creating a moral logic that justified the attacks. If hostage taking were ever to be regarded in Hizballah as a great success in its own right, Fadlallah's moral objections might dissolve into simple reservations, permitting a reformulation of his moral logic in subtle but significant ways. For he is not locked into his current position. He has never issued a formal *fatwa* forbidding all hostage taking. He has even hesitated to issue a *fatwa* regarding proper conduct when a hostage falls seriously ill. Although Fadlallah has taken a position on hostage taking, he has not staked his professional reputation as a jurist on his stand. Those who actually hold the hostages have been able to resist the "psychological situation" that Fadlallah seeks to create, precisely because he has not issued a definitive ruling. Finally, Fadlallah is wary lest he be caught contradicting Khomeini, who never issued a ruling on hostage taking and whose silence has been understood by the hostage holders as an implicit endorsement. When they have given up hostages, it has been at the bidding of Iran, not Fadlallah.

Hizballah's continuing dialectic

Hizballah is divided over the question of hostage taking. That is perhaps inevitable, for Hizballah began as a coalition and it remains one. The movement is devoted to one purpose: the eventual establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon. But its leaders continue to debate among themselves the morality and legality of the means to that elusive end. The extraordinary means employed by some within the coalition have prompted an extraordinary debate. It is unusual because in Shi'ite Islam, only the cleric can morally disengage the common believer from his acts. In that limited sense, bombers, hijackers, and hostage takers are morally dependent on Hizballah and Iran, and the verdicts of their learned scholars are hardly academic. Yet their interpretations of Islam's dictates often differ in important and even fundamental ways. The evidence for their debate in interviews and speeches only hints at what must be an intense internal disputation over the future course of the "nation" of Hizballah.

As a coalition, Hizballah is liable at any time to split. Yet Lebanon's tribulations seem only to strengthen it. Hizballah has seen its enemies retreat time and again, reinforcing its view that Lebanon's crisis will be resolved through Hizballah's ultimate triumph. But Syria proposes a very different resolution to that crisis, one in which Hizballah has no place. The movement cannot confront Syria in conventional ways and expect

victory. Hizballah is also unlikely to succeed in its bid to rid South Lebanon of all Israeli political and military influence if it resorts only to conventional methods. The debate over extraordinary means will not soon end.